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Activities during the International Year of Pulses, 2016

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Following the International Year of Pulses in 2016, activities for the promotion of pulses and their benefits have continued to raise awareness around the world and link pulses to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/231. It provides an overview of progress made during the Year on the basis of an evaluation report prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and endorsed by its Conference in 2017. Member States are recommended to continue activities from the Year and to seek to integrate them within the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 68/231, the General Assembly declared 2016 the International Year of Pulses.

2. In the resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed Economic and Social Council resolution 1980/67 on international years and anniversaries and Assembly resolutions 53/199 and 61/185 on the proclamation of international years. The Assembly invited the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to facilitate the implementation of the Year in collaboration with Governments, relevant organizations, non-governmental organizations and all other relevant stakeholders, and to keep it informed of progress.

3. Also in the resolution, the General Assembly invited all relevant stakeholders to make voluntary contributions and to provide other forms of support to the Year. It stressed that the costs of all activities arising from the implementation of the resolution above and beyond activities within the mandate of FAO should be met through voluntary contributions, including from the private sector. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its seventy-third session a focused and concise report on activities resulting from the implementation of the resolution, which would elaborate on, inter alia, the evaluation of the Year.

II. Evaluation of progress of the International Year of Pulses, 2016

4. The overarching objective of the International Year of Pulses was to raise awareness on the many benefits of pulses for food and nutrition security by opening opportunities for information exchange, improving mutual understanding through education and communication activities, promoting appropriate policies and developing the skills necessary to enhance the production and trade of pulses.

5. In order to guide implementation, an action plan for the Year was developed in collaboration with the international steering committee of the Year in 2016. The main activities of the action plan included:

(a) Regional and global consultations with pulse experts, policymakers and producer and trade organizations;

(b) Global and regional awareness campaigns through online forums, the Internet and social media;

(c) The creation of a food composition database of pulses;

(d) Research and production of documents and scientific studies, such as "The global economy of pulses" and *Pulses and their by-products as animal feed*.

6. At the fortieth session of the FAO Conference, held in Rome from 3 to 8 July 2017, member States endorsed a report on the evaluation of the International Year of Pulses, 2016,[1] highlighting the processes put in place and the overall outcomes and challenges of the Year.

7. Activities for the Year were launched around the world and served to disseminate knowledge of the benefits of pulses and foster dialogue on the development of policies that promoted their production, consumption and trade.

[1] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), document C 2017/29.

8. The activities undertaken as a result of the Year are contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. Pulses have important health benefits (Goal 3) as they are highly nutritious and densely packed with proteins — double the amount found in wheat and three times that of rice — and unlike animal sources of protein, such as beef or milk, pulses do not contain residues of hormones or antibiotics, although they may contain residues of pesticides, depending on the production method. Pulses are economically accessible, contribute to food security at all levels and foster sustainable agriculture (Goals 2 and 8). Given their versatility, poor farmers can easily grow them, resulting in more stable livelihoods and additional income. Pulse crops contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation and promote biodiversity (Goals 13 and 15), since they are more drought tolerant than major staple grains and add significant amounts of nitrogen to the soil.

9. The publication of scientific studies and a multitude of awareness campaigns have been ongoing since 2016 at the global, regional and national levels through Internet resources and social media. The website dedicated to the Year continues to promote the benefits of pulses in seven languages, including through teaching materials, fact sheets, blogs, multimedia applications, videos and audio files.[2]

10. Special ambassadors for the International Year of Pulses continue to raise public awareness in all regions on the importance of pulses and motivate relevant stakeholders to create connections throughout the food chain, to further global production of pulses and to address relevant trade challenges.

11. At the fortieth session of the FAO Conference, member States also focused on the importance of the legacy activities of the Year, including through the adoption by the Conference of its resolution 10/2017 on the potential annual observance of World Pulses Day on 10 February.

III. Conclusions

12. The International Year of Pulses succeeded in raising awareness and promoting action on the benefits of pulses and how they contribute to good health, benefit farmers' livelihoods and impact the environment. Even though dried beans, lentils and peas have been around for centuries, they will play a fundamental role in a sustainable future and contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

13. Following the Year, activities to promote the benefits of pulses have continued across the world, guided by a set of five key messages:

- **Pulses are highly nutritious**. Pulses may be small, but they are densely packed with protein, typically containing twice the amount of that found in wholegrain cereals and three times that of rice. When other foods are combined with pulses, the nutritional value of pulses is further enhanced. For example, consuming cereals with pulses has the potential to increase the protein quality of the overall meal.
- **Pulses are economically accessible and contribute to food security at all levels**. Pulses are an inexpensive source of protein, which is a crucial component of any healthy diet, but especially in poorer areas where meat, dairy and fish are economically inaccessible. Pulses can also serve as a source of income, as smallholder farmers who grow pulses can sell them at markets or process them to create added-value products.

[2] See http://www.fao.org/pulses-2016/en/.

- **Pulses have important health benefits**. When combined with food high in vitamin C, pulses' high iron content makes them a potent food for replenishing iron stores, particularly for women at reproductive age, who are more at risk of iron deficiency anaemia. Pulses are also good sources of vitamins, such as folate, which reduces the risk of neural tube defects such as spina bifida in newborn babies. With a low glycaemic index and low fat and high fibre content, pulses are suitable for people with diabetes.

- **Pulses contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation**. Pulses are climate-smart as they simultaneously adapt to climate change and contribute towards mitigating its effects. Introducing them into farming systems can be key to increasing resilience to climate change. There are many drought-resistant pulses, such as pigeon peas, bambara beans and lentils. These pulses can be cultivated in arid climates that have limited and often erratic rainfall of 300–450 mm/year.

- **Pulses promote biodiversity**. Pulses are able to increase biodiversity as they can fix their own nitrogen into the soil, which increases soil fertility. The genetic diversity of these crops is an essential component for on-farm soil and pest management, especially for small-scale farmers. Intercropping with pulses increases farm biodiversity and creates a more diverse landscape for animals and insects.

IV. Recommendations

14. Member States should continue the activities related to the International Year of Pulses and integrate them within the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by recognizing interlinkages with relevant Sustainable Development Goals and their targets and further supporting appropriate actions to achieve them.